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SOME PRESENT EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS.¹

I.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION TO COLLEGE.

ADMISSION examinations represent a feature in American education which is different from anything in the systems of the countries where educational problems have been most carefully studied.

The German boy, for instance, goes from the elementary school to the Gymnasium, where he remains under the same instruction and discipline until he is ready to go to the university for his professional course. His work during this time is strictly liberal and non-professional, and at the end he receives a certificate of proficiency in such a course. In France, where work is on the same general plan, they call this certificate a Bachelor's degree. And to my mind this is the chief thing a Bachelor's degree means—namely, that its holder has done, in lines that are recognized as useful for the purpose, enough hard intellectual work, at a good pace, to make sure that when he needs to do such work later in life he can do it with ease and efficiency. He can hardly have got through such a course without acquiring or confirming habits of attention, diligence, and clear thinking, and learning something of the meaning of history, philosophy, and science.

Our American colleges did very much the same thing as the German Gymnasium till toward the middle of this century. Boys entered at fourteen or fifteen, with a little Latin and less Greek, and some mathematics, which were then the

¹ At the meeting of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States, held at the University of Virginia, November 1-3, 1900, the principal discussion, as for some time past, was on the three subjects here treated. It is most likely that the same subjects will fill a large part of the discussion and action of the coming meeting of the Association, November 6-8, 1901, to be held at the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee. It is believed, therefore, that the brief papers here offered have a distinct timeliness and value.—EDITOR.

chief things taught in the schools beyond the three R's, and came out four years later with what was after all for the times a sound discipline and a good preparation for later work.

It would be highly instructive to trace the stages of growth from this to the present state of things. I have some interesting statistics to show that the largest factor was the demand for college graduates as teachers in the higher institutions. Take Harvard as a case in point. The Harvard A.B. degree, for those who care to make such use of it, is worth more to a candidate for a position as teacher than many a Ph.D. degree, and those who get it average twenty-three years old—an increase of four years since the early days. The schools have followed this raising of the standard, and such schools as the Phillips Academies, for instance, give now a course as advanced as that of the colleges seventy years ago.²

The result of this raising of the standard, without adding to the traditional four years of the college course, has been a break or transition in the period devoted to liberal education, which has some distinct advantages. German pedagogues complain of the trouble from dull students, who have begun the course and must be carried through the Gymnasium. We eliminate a large part of this element by our college admission examinations. Our college students form a more select body than those in the secondary schools—a sort of intellectual aristocracy, which can work at a better pace and in a more independent way. This forms an excellent transition from school to university methods, and brings into a young man's life, at just the age when it is good for him, incentives to a wholesome independence in thought and conduct.

It seems to me that those advantages are worth keeping,

² It is pertinent to note here that a statistical study shows that students of about the same age are found to be reading the same classical authors and doing the same work in mathematics and other subjects, whether it be in 1800 or 1900, or whether the institution be called a school, college, or university.

and that we now have good opportunities to formulate our work here in the South so as to secure them. The course outlined by President Dabney³ can be completed, with proper preparation and good instruction, at the age of twenty. This is about all the time that young men will or should give to their liberal education; if they have to stay longer in college, we find that they and their intellectual purveyors are getting uneasy and trying to make the work count in some way toward professional training. The last part of this work should be done in college, but the exact amount of time spent there is a matter of detail; three years are enough if the schools are strong. In most parts of the South, however, they are not strong, and I believe our ends will be best served by defining clearly the beginning and end of a four years' course, confining it strictly to non-professional study, and leaving room for the schools, as they improve, to take over another year at the beginning.

I believe that the general principles of the plan before the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States meet the problems of the beginning of this course as well as any that could be devised. The plan practically compels the candidate for admission to have a knowledge of English sufficient for the beginning of college work, to have the foundation in Latin for humanistic studies, and in mathematics for scientific studies. For the rest, it very properly allows the schools to send the result of whatever they can do, only insisting that they must send enough of something to insure a uniform standard of maturity among the students who are to be in the same classes. Each college can provide for the admission of students prepared beyond this standard, and in general administer examinations in accordance with the local conditions of its feeding schools.

But while the plan is admirable in its general principles, it is open to some objections in the details. The greatest of these is that the values given to the various subjects, in many

³"Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States." *The School Review*, Vol. VII., No. 3.

cases, do not represent equivalent amounts of work. The number of points appears to have been taken bodily from the Harvard requirements in each subject, while the amount of work required is in many subjects materially different.

The idea of the Harvard unit is, I believe, the amount of work done under average conditions in the subject as one of five in the last year of the preparatory course. With this principle, or something like it, certainly the history and science requirements (two points each) are rated too high, as well as the mathematics (four points), French (two points), and German (two points); while the English (four points), Latin (four points), and Greek (two points) are about right, unless the Greek is too low. Certainly no one will claim that one hundred pages of French, on any conceivable plan of instruction, can furnish as much work as the same amount of Greek. The whole scheme seems to be drawn up in a way which will allow a candidate who is afraid of the old classical curriculum to get in on a par with those who are not, with a much inferior quantity and quality of work. I am a thorough believer in Greek, but I have no sympathy with those who will not admit that a liberal education is possible without it; and I have still less with the man of science whose attitude in the matter is that of the Irishman who praised this country because "wan man is jist as good as another, and a little betther, be jabbers." I insist that, while good training can be got from almost any subject, the work must be just as real in one case as another.

The statements in history and science are utterly indefinite. "One year's work" may mean almost anything. The Harvard announcements have pages of fine print stating exactly what is meant in the way of work in each subject, and something of the sort is necessary if the schools are to have any idea of what is wanted of them.

Another general criticism is that the statements ignore the now generally accepted principle that examinations of this kind should be, so far as possible, a test of power to work in a subject, rather than of having been over a certain ground. On this principle, all translation tests should be at

sight, grammar questions should be general, the examination in geometry should consist of original problems, and a similar plan should be followed throughout wherever possible.

A special examination in arithmetic, when there is one in algebra, reminds us of the man who cut a hole in the barn door for the cat, and a smaller one for her kitten. No one can pass in algebra unless he knows enough general arithmetic to pass an examination in it if required, and the stronger colleges no longer hold one. In Germany, by the way, the two subjects are treated together and combined in one text-book.

There is room for a definite statement of other subjects as additional or alternative, in Latin, Greek, and mathematics; *e. g.*, Homer, Vergil, and solid geometry.

Students not candidates for a degree should not be allowed to enter without English and mathematics. Probably a certain number of such students must be tolerated for the present, but they should not have the privileges of college students without showing some degree of ability to use them, and the proposed change would be a step backward in this matter. I prophesy an ultimate gain in numbers as well as in quality of students for the first colleges which take a more vertebrate attitude generally toward special students.

On the whole, then, we may cordially indorse the general principle of this plan; but the details of it should be subject to a great deal of revision, and a competent committee should formulate a fairer scale of values and extended statements, as clear and explicit as possible, of the exact meaning of the requirements in each subject. If it were possible to do some of this work before the measure passes, it would be very well.

E. H. BABBITT.

II.

THE LIMITATIONS OF ELECTIVE WORK IN SCHOOL AND COLLEGE.

It is noteworthy that the strongest protest against the indiscriminate extension of the elective system has come from the

same quarter whence has radiated probably the greatest number of influences in favor of that system. Harvard by no means deserves the credit for having introduced Americans to more liberal methods and courses of instruction; but it is scarcely too much to say that the well-known address of Mr. Charles Francis Adams before the Phi Beta Kappa Society contributed as much as any other single agency to the work of emancipating us from the blind worship of former ideals. The score of years which separate the publication of Mr. Adams's indictment of the then prevailing methods of education, and the appearance in a recent number of the *Atlantic* of Dean Briggs's cautiously advanced doubts regarding the success of the recent revolution in education, may be looked upon as the period in which the elective system has reached the high-water mark of its development. After an experiment of upward of twenty years, during which time liberal views respecting the aptitude of different minds for different subjects have penetrated all departments of American education, the inevitable reaction has come, and we find the faith of not a few in the unlimited freedom of choice in the matter of studies shaken as it has not been shaken in many a year.

But however welcome this changed attitude may be, it would be a very grave mistake to underrate the value of the movement with which I have so intimately associated the name of Mr. Adams. Mr. Adams gave expression to a widely diffused popular conviction when he vigorously attacked the shortcomings of the educational traditions of his day. His thesis was delivered, moreover, at a time when the nation had so far recovered from the disasters of the Civil War as to be able to reap the advantages—material, political, social, and intellectual—which followed in the wake of that struggle. The rapid accumulation of wealth, the consciousness of increased strength at home and abroad, the opening up of new careers of usefulness for the youth of our land, the final settlement of the slavery question, and the novel problems brought about in no small measure by the altered state of things, quickened the popular understanding and drew

fresh attention to the glaring discrepancies between the actual requirements of educated persons and the courses of instruction provided by our various schools and colleges.

Now it so happened that the dawning self-consciousness which I have so imperfectly indicated coincided to some extent with a general advance in scientific knowledge on both sides of the Atlantic, whilst an ever-increasing army of enthusiastic young specialists, trained for original research at the universities of Germany, were returning home to take part in the unusual opportunities for teaching which had been created by private philanthropy and State generosity. It will not do to attempt to depreciate the achievements of an epoch which must ever remain one of the best and most fruitful in the history of American education. To it we are indebted for many beneficent changes, including the elevation of the natural sciences to something approaching their true dignity and a recognition of the value of modern languages not only for cultural purposes, but also as a means for keeping in touch with progress in all departments of knowledge, to say nothing of the impetus given to the study of historical and political science. We owe also to this period another potent influence exerted in the course of modern education: I refer to that spirit of original investigation which has done more, perhaps, than anything else in this century to widen the bounds of knowledge and to render the study of every subject attractive.

That the influences which I have just indicated have produced catholic, liberal, uplifting results few would probably be disposed to gainsay. At the same time they have, in my opinion, thrust prominently forward the inevitable conflict between the college and the university idea and encouraged many institutions, with equipments ridiculously out of proportion to their ambition, to assume the rôle of more richly endowed seats of learning, and thus to lose sight of the only reason for their existence. It is not my purpose to contrast the relative functions of college and university, but every true friend of education must surely wish to see a sharp line of distinction maintained between the two. In a university the

elective system must necessarily be given the very freest scope; for students entering such an institution are presumed to have received that broad preliminary training without which few can ever hope to avail themselves of the learning and opportunities afforded by a band of trained specialists. "Everybody," as Dean Briggs so well puts it, "believes in the elective system at some stage of education; the question is where to begin." And one might very well add that, in considering the subject of electives, it is neither wise nor just to close one's eyes either to actual local conditions or to the character and attainments of students who clamor for greater freedom in the election of studies.

Could any one, for example, who is familiar with the average institution of learning in the Southern States, claim that the university idea should be further encouraged so long as things remain as they are? Would it not be far wiser, at least for the present, to devote our energies to true college work, and leave the whole subject of university training to more richly endowed foundations? It seems to me that the sooner we dismiss from our minds the idea of a university, and direct our attention to undergraduate work, the sooner will we rid ourselves of a host of annoying difficulties and no end of just ridicule. I know of one Southern city which boasts of five universities (white and colored) and a Southern State with almost as many universities as there are in Germany; but scarcely any one of these offers an undergraduate course equal to that of the average small college in New England. In spite of our defective system of secondary schools, such institutions have an augmenting number of elective courses, embracing nearly every haven of learning from typewriting to Greek. This wretched state of things may be traced, in no slight measure, to the readiness with which half-educated persons have laid hold of the noble conception of a university in order to pander to the indolence of youth or to the covetousness of old age. It would be amusing could we ignore the direful consequences of such practices.

If at a true university the elective system should receive

every encouragement, it ought to find no place whatever in a secondary school. At a college it might be allowed to a limited extent to members of the more advanced classes. What studies are to be included in a college course, and how far a student must be carried in such branches, are questions which remain to be settled. But the youth at college ought surely to be taught at least Latin, mathematics, English, French or German, chemistry, physics or biology, history, economics, and philosophy. And, what is probably more to the point, he should be taught these subjects by a college instructor rather than by a university professor. Whether stress should be laid on the humanistic or on the scientific side of education, is a question satisfactorily answered years ago by John Stuart Mill in his Aberdeen address, when he assured his hearers that one is a very lopsided sort of person who does not devote sufficient time to both sides of the subject.

The only prescribed work at Harvard is in the Freshman year, when six hours weekly are required in English. Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors have the utmost freedom of choice; but it must be remembered that a very rigid entrance examination is required. The average boy goes up to Harvard, moreover, from preparatory schools which are frequently superior to our Southern colleges. Under such circumstances, therefore, many Eastern universities can well afford to allow their students in the Senior year to elect professional courses—a plan that has become especially desirable since the lengthening of professional courses of instruction.

As has been said already, many of even our best Southern institutions give the greatest latitude in the matter of electives—too great a latitude, indeed, according to a growing number of educators. It would be difficult, on the other hand, to devise a greater incentive to study than the old four years' course, with its Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior classes. Under such a system a student realizes that he must either keep up with his fellows or drop behind. Few students, moreover, who enter college really know what they ought to study, and, unfortunately, their parents

are frequently unable to offer them the wise counsel they stand in need of. Hence it is for the college authorities to give this advice, and not allow the youth intrusted to their charge to shirk studies merely because they are difficult. Such a careful system would aid in that character-building which forms such an important element in every plan of education. If, therefore, the elective system is to be continued, it should be so recast as to render it at once helpful and rational, or, as President Dabney has put it: "The elective system is one thing; to give absolute freedom of election, without system, is a very different thing. . . . It is absurd to talk about a seventeen-year-old boy electing for himself a course of liberal education, and it is even more absurd to permit him to take the course in any order he may choose." Here, I think, the class system may again be commended; for under it a student must have taken for a given time a certain prescribed course before he can exercise his right of election. In other words, the college authorities decide when he is to take his electives and the order in which he is to take them. But as long as our students are so badly prepared for college, I think that it would be a serious mistake to permit them to select one-half the course they are to pursue; one-third would be a liberal allowance.

In conclusion, I am tempted to offer one suggestion more: Those engaged in teaching are often prone to imagine that some one method is the best possible for all times and under all circumstances. I have endeavored to controvert this opinion and to show that every system of education must necessarily be a tentative one and, above all things, adapted to the varying needs of the community in which such a system may obtain. Because the elective system is successful at Northern and European seats of learning, it does not necessarily follow that our Southern institutions are fully prepared as yet to adopt the plan in its entirety. It may be the goal toward which we ought to aspire, but is it not our duty to prepare the ground in the meantime?

B. J. RAMAGE.

III.

THE UNIFICATION OF COLLEGE DEGREES.

It was a very significant meeting that was held in Chicago in the spring of 1900, when representatives from some ten of the greatest American universities came together on the question of uniform requirements for the Doctor's degree. This necessarily implied some belief in a fixed basis as to the requirements for the Bachelor's degree as groundwork for the more advanced studies. At a time when the greater powers of the world can unite with the avowed purpose, at least, of suppressing crimes against civilization in China, it ought to be easily possible for the stronger academic institutions with kindred aims to join in opposing strenuously crimes against education in America.

Three educational papers of no small import have recently come from Southern sources: one, by Chancellor Kirkland, before the Southern Educational Association, in Memphis, on "The Duty of the State toward Higher Education;" and two, to be found in the "Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States," on "Requirements for the Bachelor's Degree" and on "College Degrees," respectively by President Dabney and Mr. Mooney.

As soon as the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools for the Southern States has drawn the line that ought to separate absolutely school work and college work, at that moment another line ought to be drawn parallel to this, wherein a definite quantity and character of work should be made necessary for any and every Bachelor's degree, and similarly other parallels ought to be drawn for still higher academic honors. While calling attention to needed limits at one end, it would be as mischievous, and possibly even more harmful, to neglect precise boundaries and barriers at the other.

That is to say, first a definite standard of preparation ought to be provided for in a decent preparatory school course before college work be permitted at all. This is where the

energies of the Association hitherto have been chiefly bent. Then it ought to be made clear, following the suggestions made by the paper of Chancellor Kirkland, what endowment, what equipment, and what possibilities for work a college ought to possess to be a college and to be entitled of right and in public opinion to give the Bachelor's degree. Together with this, following the suggestions of President Dabney, a course of studies of a certain quantity and character, giving due regard to individual interest and caprice, and permitting a certain, though not too great, amount of election, should be carried through the four years of additional work based upon the entrance examinations to the Freshman or lowest class, already agreed upon.

Owing to the efficiency of the preparatory schools and the advanced age of the students entering college—at Harvard said to be above nineteen—the tendency in the institutions in the eastern and northern and central parts of our country seems undeniably in the direction of abandoning the traditional four college classes and reducing these in practice to three, and in some instances even to two. This is done in effect by permitting the candidate to enter upon his professional work in his last year or years, and have it count for both degrees. But for institutions in the Southern States to reduce the four years of the college course to a smaller number would be mere imitation, as we have merely imitated the shadow in other respects without grasping always the substance. I take it, it is conceivable and easily possible for a bright boy only fifteen (the minimum age imposed by the Southern Association), and certainly sixteen years old, to pass the present entrance examinations. For our institutions to permit the last year or years to count both in academic and professional work is to widen still farther the breach with the grade of culture attainable in our best institutions. If we are, perhaps, at least one or two years behind, say, the Harvard entrance examinations, judging by the average age of entrance to the Freshman class—and I suppose few will contend that a Massachusetts boy of sixteen or seventeen is less prepared than the Virginia or Tennessee

boy of sixteen or seventeen; and if, from possible lack of endowment, the opportunities for training or culture within the actual four college years of the Virginia or Tennessee boy may possibly be less, surely it were a pity to limit still further the possibilities of culture of the Southern youth by cutting unnecessarily short his academic course and telling him he is now prepared to enter upon the best professional work, when demonstrably he is not. To the writer at least, under present conditions in the Southern States, a course of four full years to obtain the Bachelor's degree seems the only adequate one. It is perhaps a mere corollary to emphasize this element of time entering into all education. In his own department of English the writer cannot understand how a feeling for literature can be aroused or the mastery over language be acquired except by long acquaintance and by constant and even painful practice. The element of time is their very essence.

But if there is a real danger from some institutions with professional schools thus to cut something off the last years of the academic curriculum, in favor of law, medicine, theology, or other work, in order to get the young man out earlier into life, a far greater danger springs from the very small and weak colleges—so called by grace and by act of legislature—without sufficient foundation to go upon, and with neither material equipment nor Faculty to provide a full and thorough curriculum, nor with training and, above all, with culture enough to bestow the Bachelor's degree. These are the ones Chancellor Kirkland's minimum requirements in material endowment would absolutely cut off, and President Dabney's schedule of studies would render at once out of the question.

The same argument applies with special force to the Bachelor of Science degree of many small colleges. If a college, owing to the meagerness of equipment and smallness of Faculty, can barely give one well-defined Bachelor's course, then it certainly should not give two Bachelor degrees. If an institution gives a just A.B. degree, but cannot give an equally worthy B.Sc., clearly it ought not, as used to be the case

and may be still in some places, to bestow B.Sc. on the poorer student because he failed to get A.B. If B.Sc., B.Litt., or by whatever name the Bachelor's degree is known, is not clearly up to the level of the best Bachelor's work, in the number and character of the studies, then clearly the Bachelor's degree ought not to be given at all. If B.Sc. is only a half or a two-thirds or a three-fourths A.B., then it is not a worthy Bachelor's title of any sort. A certificate or a statement could be given to testify to the actual work completed, if this be deemed advisable, but certainly no Bachelor's title.

Precisely how many hours or courses, and of what sort, how far prescribed and how far elective, should be required for any Bachelor's degree, and further for the Master's degree based upon the Bachelor's, might, in any well-defined system, just as easily be determined by a governing board as the subject of entrance examinations and the requisite courses in the preparatory school before admission to college. Accord with a general system would be entirely compatible with personal modifications so as to preserve individuality—something also very desirable and characteristic of every successful institution with proper college spirit.

As to higher academic degrees, the paper of Mr. Mooney, already referred to, contains matter for sober reflection. If schools are ambitious to pose as colleges, better institutions are ambitious to pose as universities doing genuine graduate work. If stronger institutions are disposed to criticise weaker ones and reflect on the character of the Bachelor's degree of the latter, from a wider world point of view may not some reflections be cast on the meagerness of material equipment and Faculty of these better institutions in venturing, on their part, to bestow doubtfully the Doctor's degree? When it is contended that a certain annual income, a certain character of library, men in the Faculty doing exclusively college work, are necessary for a college giving the Bachelor's degree, must it not also be frankly faced whether an annual income of another power, a library of still another character, men in the Faculty doing exclusively graduate

work, be not all the more vitally necessary for a university giving the Doctor's degree. If we are agreed that the same man cannot do both preparatory and college work well, are we satisfied that the same man can more satisfactorily combine undergraduate with the best graduate work? It is the same mistaken ambition that animates both teacher and professor. Although working under unfavorable conditions, we are ambitious to be doing what we feel we are prepared to do and might do under favorable ones. But as long as the conditions are thus unfavorable, have we the educational right to yield?

The character of our Southern and American education and civilization is at stake. Every degree given must compete with the same degree everywhere else in the world—the best anywhere—or there must be confessed failure. It is the same with the Bachelor's, Master's, Doctor's, and any degree. There cannot be different and varying standards in the world of literature, of scientific work, of professional achievement. There is only one criterion: the best. Matthew Arnold laid it down long ago for excellence in poetry, and it will apply to education too. The true office of an Association of Colleges and Schools is to define and keep clear educational distinctions; to declare frankly and fully what we can do, and just as clearly what we have no right to do until conditions warrant.

I say this as a cardinal principle, although I am not hopeless, as some are. "What outlook is there for education in the South?" I heard a Southern scholar say, who was doing the work he had carefully prepared himself for at a strong Northern institution: "What hope have you for education in the South, when you have no institution with a library even of one hundred thousand volumes and with an annual income for all purposes of even \$150,000." That was on a visit to a Northern city. Six months later, in another Northern city, another Southerner asked: "Tell me candidly, What of the South? Has she any intellectual movements? I really wish to know." And both these men were gravely in earnest, I could see.

We who are in the Southern States, working in faith and hope, believe differently and know differently. But we know, too, that there is much to be done. Until our Southern people—who are not all paupers by any means—put their hands into their pockets and endow libraries and laboratories, and provide institutions with opportunities for special and graduate work, and give Southern scholars who have some brains, and energy too, the same broad and mighty opportunities that five or six of the best institutions in America possess, we must bide our time in patience. We should always prepare for the work to come. We should always emphasize the living principles of research, personal work, and independent thought. We should encourage as many pupils as possible to go to the larger universities in America and abroad to get the best that is offered in the world. We should be found ready ourselves to use the golden opportunity when it ever offers, and I am persuaded it will offer in time. But any less standards in our graduate courses and in the Doctor title in the Southern States will but tend to put the climax on insularity and ignorance and pretense, which have too frequently been faults generally of American education.

J. B. HENNEMAN.